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ABSTRACT

This learning module, which is part of a three-block series intended to help human service workers develop the skills necessary to solve the problems encountered in their daily contact with elderly clients of different cultural backgrounds, deals with the work environment of a human services worker who deals primarily with elderly minority persons. The general objectives of the module are to help human services workers understand the importance of stress and quality of life to the work experience, the role of stressors and the ways in which work conditions could produce a stressful experience, ways in which excessive stress may be avoided or reduced, and some major characteristics or conditions of human services jobs that may become stressors. The following topics are covered in the individual sections: stress and quality of life; the stressor; ways of avoiding or reducing excessive stress (identification of potential stressors in the work environment, realization of their impact, and ways in which demands, constraints, and opportunities can contribute to stress); and characteristics or conditions of human services jobs as potential stressors (role, role conflict, role ambiguity, quantitative and qualitative role overload, role underload and underutilization, and role significance). A list of suggested resources is appended. (MN)

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BLOCK C
Work Environment

MODULE C.1
Work Environment I

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Elderly Service Workers' Training Project

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WORK ENVIRONMENT I

MODULE C.1

THE ELDERLY SERVICE WORKERS' TRAINING PROJECT WISHES TO EXPRESS APPRECIATION OF THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE "WORK ENVIRONMENT I" MODULE.

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INTRODUCTION

THE AMOUNT OF TIME WE SPEND AT WORK AND THE IMPORTANCE WE ATTACH TO OUR WORK ROLE SHOW THAT WORK IS CENTRAL IN THE LIVES OF MOST OF US.

WORK HAS THE POTENTIAL FOR PROVIDING US WITH FINANCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SATISFACTION, A SENSE OF SELF-WORTH AND WELL-BEING. IT CAN EVEN BE CHALLENGING AND EXCITING. HOWEVER, WORK CAN ALSO BE AGGRAVATING, BORING, FRUSTRATING AND EVEN HARMFUL TO OUR HEALTH. IN FACT, STRESS AT WORK IS SO COMMON THAT WE TEND TO ACCEPT IT AS AN UNAVOIDABLE PART OF WORKING LIFE. IT IS ALSO A FACT THAT MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, TODAY'S MEN AND WOMEN EXPECT SATISFACTION AND FULFILLMENT FROM THEIR WORK AND NO LONGER VIEW WORK IN ECONOMIC TERMS ONLY.

A MAJOR GOAL OF LIFE AND WORK IN OUR SOCIETY TODAY IS TO ACHIEVE, MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE OUR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND THE QUALITY OF OUR LIVES. TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND AND LEARN HOW TO PREVENT EXCESSIVE LEVELS OF STRESS AND HOW TO MANAGE STRESSFUL SITUATIONS. STRESS CAN OCCUR IN ANY AREA OF OUR LIVES.

SINCE WORK IS SO IMPORTANT TO MOST OF US, THE PRESENT MODULE WILL DEAL MOSTLY WITH WORK STRESS AND QUALITY OF WORK LIFE. AS WE SHALL SEE LATER, THE EXPERIENCE OF STRESS IS A HIGHLY INDIVIDUAL MATTER. THEREFORE, THE PURPOSE OF THIS MODULE IS TO PROVIDE YOU WITH SOME BASIC CONCEPTS, PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

WHICH YOU CAN THEN APPLY TO YOUR OWN PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCE.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

UPON COMPLETION OF THIS MODULE, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DESCRIBE:

(1) THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONCEPTS OF STRESS AND QUALITY OF LIFE TO OUR EXPERIENCE AT WORK.

(2) THE CONCEPT OF STRESSOR AND HOW WORK CONDITIONS COULD PRODUCE A STRESSFUL EXPERIENCE.

(3) WAYS IN WHICH YOU MAY POTENTIALLY AVOID OR REDUCE EXCESSIVE STRESS.

(4) SOME MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OR CONDITIONS OF JOBS WHICH MAY BECOME STRESSORS, IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT OF HUMAN SERVICE WORKERS.

THE FOLLOWING SECTION WILL PRESENT TO YOU THE IMPORTANCE OF TWO CONCEPTS TO OUR EXPERIENCE AT WORK.

STRESS AND QUALITY OF LIFE

UPON COMPLETION OF THIS SECTION, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DESCRIBE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONCEPTS OF STRESS AND QUALITY OF LIFE TO OUR EXPERIENCE AT WORK.

STRESS AND QUALITY OF LIFE

THE CONCEPTS OF STRESS AND QUALITY OF LIFE ARE NECESSARY TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF HOW WE FEEL ABOUT OUR WORK, AND HOW WORK AFFECTS OUR LIVES IN GENERAL AND OUR WORK PERFORMANCE IN PARTICULAR.

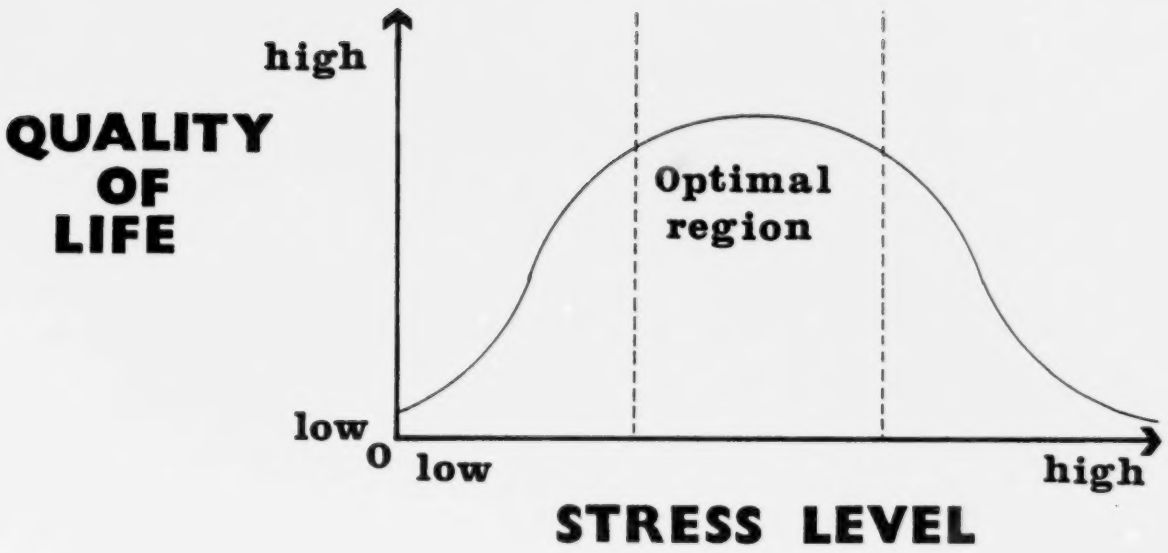
(1) STRESS IS A COMPLEX PROCESS INVOLVING STRESSFUL EVENTS OR CONDITIONS THAT PRODUCE A PSYCHOLOGICAL OR PHYSICAL REACTION IN THE INDIVIDUAL THAT IS USUALLY UNPLEASANT AND SOMETIMES RESULTS IN SYMPTOMS OF EMOTIONAL OR PHYSIOLOGICAL DISABILITY. THE STRESS PROCESS MAY BE ELICITED WHEN THE FOLLOWING TWO CONDITIONS OCCUR: (I) WE PERCEIVE DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN DEMANDS PLACED ON US AND OUR ASSESSMENT OF OUR OWN CAPABILITIES TO SUCCESSFULLY MEET THOSE DEMANDS, AND (II) WHEN THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH DISCREPANCIES ARE UNCERTAIN AND IMPORTANT TO OUR PHYSICAL AND/OR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING.

(2) QUALITY OF LIFE IS ANOTHER FREQUENTLY USED TERM. IT REFERS TO AN OVERALL PERCEPTION, BY AN INDIVIDUAL OR A GROUP, OF HAPPINESS AND SATISFACTION. THIS PERCEPTION CONSISTS OF PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING.

THE TWO CONCEPTS DEFINED ABOVE ARE SEEMINGLY OPPOSITE, SUGGESTING THAT THE HIGHER THE STRESS LEVELS THE POORER IS THE QUALITY OF LIFE AND AS THE STRESS LEVELS DECREASE THE QUALITY OF LIFE IMPROVES. ACTUALLY THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRESS AND QUALITY OF LIFE IS MORE COMPLEX AND FOLLOWS A CURVED FUCTION AS ILLUSTRATED

IN FIGURE 1.

FIGURE 1.



THE GRAPH IN FIGURE 1 SHOWS THAT STRESS AT MILD TO MODERATE LEVELS GOES HAND IN HAND WITH QUALITY OF LIFE. AT THESE LEVELS STRESS CAN BE THE "SPICE OF LIFE" (EUSTRESS), THE ENERGIZER AND MOBILIZER OF OUR PRODUCTIVE ENERGIES. IT IS AT THE EXTREME LEVELS - BOTH VERY HIGH AND VERY LOW - THAT STRESS CAN BE DEBILITATING (WEAKENING) AND QUALITY OF LIFE DETERIORATES CONSIDERABLY.

The following section will present the concept of stressor and explain how work conditions could produce a stressful experience.

THE STRESSOR

Upon completion of this section, you will be able to describe the concept of stressor and how work conditions could produce a stressful experience.

The Stressor

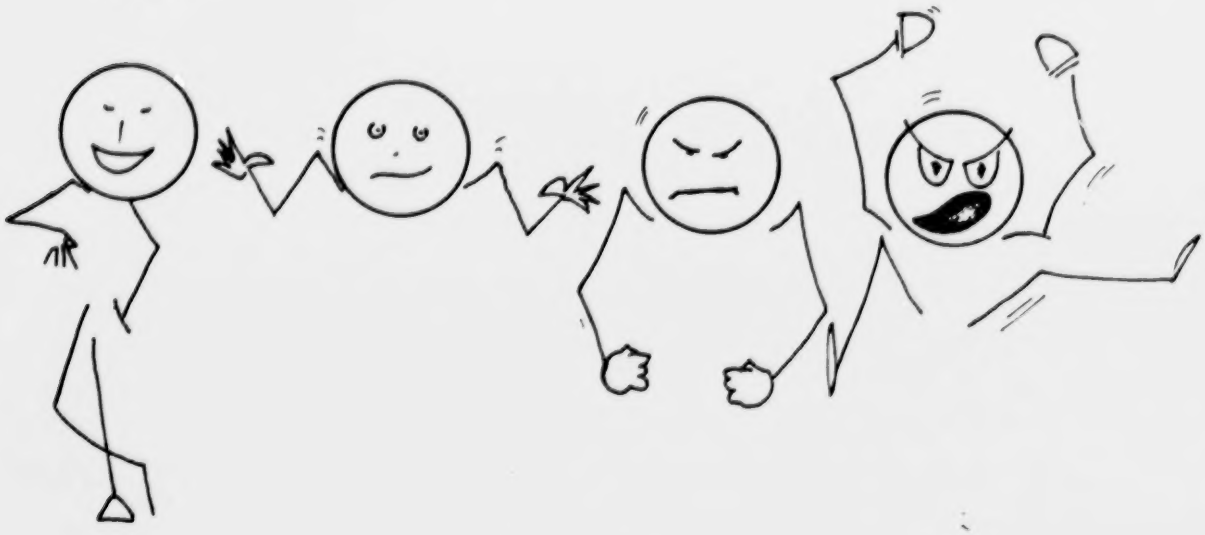
Any condition or event that produces the experience of stress is called stressor. How can we determine if a specific stressor will produce physical or psychological symptoms of disease? We need to look at the following three components:

1. The physical, social or psychological environment or setting. Any work setting may be viewed as threatening, neutral or supportive.

2. The vulnerability of the individual to specific stressors. Vulnerability depends on the more-or-less permanent personality make up of the individual, on the one hand, and on the day-to-day shifts and changes in mood, expectations and sense of well-being and comfort, on the other. A person may be irritable, optimistic or confident by general disposition. However, on any particular day, one may be more or less irritable, optimistic or confident than usual for him or for her.

3. FOR ANY SPECIFIC STRESSOR TO PRODUCE SYMPTOMS IT NEED BE EXTREMELY POWERFUL OR OCCUR WHEN BOTH (1) THE INDIVIDUAL IS VULNERABLE AND (2) THE SETTING IS THREATENING OR HARMFUL. ALL STRESSORS INVOLVE CHANGE IN SOME WAY. IN AN ORGANIZATION CHANGES OFTEN OCCUR IN THE TASKS PERFORMED, IN THE USE OF COMFORTABLE ROUTINES OR IN ONE'S SUPERVISORS. SOMETIMES THE SAME OLD SUPERVISOR OR THE FAMILIAR ROUTINE, UNCHANGED IN THEMSELVES, CAN PRODUCE STRESS SYMPTOMS WHEN THE VULNERABILITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL SHARPLY INCREASES DUE TO A NONWORK EVENT.

IT APPEARS FROM THE ABOVE THAT AN INDIVIDUAL CAN HANDLE A HARMFUL STRESSOR IF THE ENVIRONMENT IS SEEN AS SUPPORTIVE AND IF HIS OR HER VULNERABILITY IS LOW. WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT OUR VULNERABILITY TO STRESS REACTIONS IS ADDITIVE OVER TIME AND THAT STRESSORS IN OUR LIVES OUTSIDE THE WORKPLACE CAN ADD UP TO REDUCE OUR RESISTANCE TO COMMON STRESSORS IN THE WORKPLACE AND VICE VERSA.



WHEN A PERSON EXPERIENCES DIFFICULTIES IN HER OR HIS PERSONAL LIFE, SUCH AS AN ILLNESS OF A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY, DIVORCE OR SEPARATION, OR TAKING OUT A HEAVY MORTGAGE, THE OVERALL VULNERABILITY OF THE PERSON CAN SHARPLY INCREASE AND RENDER SEEMINGLY HARMLESS EVENTS, SUCH AS A MILD COMPLAINT FROM A CLIENT, A HARSH LOOK FROM A SUPERVISOR----EXTREMELY STRESSFUL. IN THE SAME WAY, STRESSFUL EXPERIENCES AT WORK CAN MAKE A TYPICALLY MILD PERSON LASH OUT AT HIS FAMILY MEMBERS FOR NO APPARENT REASON. IT IS LIKE THE STRAW THAT BREAKS THE CAMEL'S BACK.

THE FOLLOWING SECTION WILL PRESENT WAYS IN WHICH YOU MAY AVOID OR REDUCE EXCESSIVE STRESS.

AVOIDING OR REDUCING EXCESSIVE STRESS

UPON COMPLETION OF THIS SECTION, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DESCRIBE WAYS IN WHICH YOU MAY POTENTIALLY AVOID OR REDUCE EXCESSIVE STRESS.

Avoiding or Reducing Excessive Stress

HIGH LEVELS OF STRESS ARE HARMFUL. IN ORDER TO AVOID OR REDUCE THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF UNCONTROLLED STRESS WE NEED TO:

(1) PREVENT EXCESSIVE STRESS FROM OCCURRING AND/OR

(2) MANAGE STRESS ONCE IT HAS OCCURRED.

THE FIRST STEP IN ATTEMPTING TO PREVENT OR CONTROL STRESS INVOLVES THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE SPECIFIC, POTENTIALLY HARMFUL STRESSORS IN YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT AND BECOMING AWARE OF THEIR IMPACT ON YOU. THIS INVOLVES THE CAREFUL EXAMINATION OF (A) ONE'S WORK ENVIRONMENT AND (B) THE AVAILABLE RESOURCES OF THE PERSON TO DEAL WITH THE STRESS.

THE SECOND STEP INVOLVES THE EMPLOYMENT OF STRATEGIES FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT. THIS IS BEYOND THE SCOPE OF THE PRESENT MODULE.

Identifying Potential Stressors in the Work Environment and Becoming Aware of their Impact on You.

We said earlier that stress reactions can occur in response to a wide variety of environmental conditions. In most cases the stressfulness is not so much in the event or object itself but rather in the perceived uncertainty of the situation which could produce important outcomes for the individual.

Demands and Constraints Can Contribute to Stress.

Demands and constraints, particularly in changing circumstances, make it more difficult for workers to do what they want to do or what they are expected to do. As the demands and constraints on the worker increase, the uncertainty about what constitutes appropriate behavior in the organization also increases, and consequently may produce stress.

Opportunities Can Also Contribute to Stress.

We tend to believe that only harsh conditions and threats to our physical and psychological well-being can produce stress. Contrary to this belief, attractive opportunities for promotion, advancement and a better job can also result in stress as long as they create change and uncertainty and have potentially important outcomes for our work and non-work lives. A better job opportunity, for example, promises a salary increase but also uncertainty about our ability to handle the new responsibilities, adjustment to new colleagues, bosses and clients; it may involve a change in the social status of the family and in decisions on how to spend the additional income. Thus it seems that attractive job opportunities may carry with them new risks and uncertainty, which could result in stress.

THIS SECTION WILL PRESENT SOME MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OR CONDITIONS OF JOBS WHICH MAY BECOME STRESSORS, IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT OF HUMAN SERVICE WORKERS.

SOME MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OR CONDITIONS OF JOBS AS POTENTIAL STRESSORS

UPON COMPLETION OF THIS SECTION, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DESCRIBE SOME MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OR CONDITIONS OF JOBS WHICH MAY BECOME STRESSORS, IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT OF HUMAN SERVICE WORKERS.

ROLE

BEFORE WE LOOK AT SOME OF THESE MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OR CONDITIONS OF JOBS, WE NEED TO INTRODUCE THE CONCEPT OF "ROLE".

A ROLE IS DEFINED AS A SET OF EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE BEHAVIOUR OF AN INDIVIDUAL OCCUPYING A CERTAIN POSITION. THESE EXPECTATIONS ARE NORMALLY COMMUNICATED TO THE INDIVIDUAL BY THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM HE OR SHE USUALLY INTERACTS IN THAT ROLE, INCLUDING ONE'S OWN EXPECTATIONS. EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE BEHAVIOUR OF A CAREGIVER IN A NURSING HOME, FOR EXAMPLE, MAY COME FROM THE DIRECTOR, SUPERVISORS, PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES, CO-WORKERS, THE GENERAL PUBLIC, AND THE CAREGIVER HERSELF.

Role Conflict.

Role conflict is experienced by a worker when he or she perceives conflicting expectations about how he or she is to perform in that role. A very caring but inexperienced worker may respond primarily to the expectations of her older adult patients and their families, attempting to maximize their comfort and reduce their loneliness. This may involve working overtime without additional pay and occasionally neglecting routine administrative duties. This behaviour will likely antagonize the co-workers to the extent that it is in conflict with the established norm. The director may be pleased with the worker's devotion to her or his patients beyond the call of duty but would reprimand the worker for neglecting routine tasks. In addition, the demands of this worker's role, as she percieves it, may conflict with other roles she holds in her non-work life, such as being a devoted wife and mother, and a daughter of older adult parents herself. The totality of the conflicting demands on this hypothetical worker could result in physical and emotional exhaustion, guilt, anger, and helplessness.

Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity is defined as uncertainty about how one is to perform a role. This uncertainty results from unclear or insufficient information about the appropriate role behaviour. For example, it may may not be clear to the caregiver how much personal involvement he or she should have with his older adult clients, particularly with the terminally ill. This could lead to increased tension, self-doubt and guilt.

Quantitative Role Overload.

This means that the worker is expected to do more than what time allows. It means that the demands of the

ROLE EXCEED AVAILABLE TIME OR THAT THEY INTERFERE WITH THE TIME REQUIRED TO FILL THE OTHER ROLES OF THE WORKER, SUCH AS FAMILY ROLES.

QUALITATIVE ROLE OVERLOAD

THIS MEANS THAT THE DEMANDS OF THE ROLE EXCEED THE TRAINING AND COMPETENCIES OF THE WORKER. COUNSELLING THE FAMILY OF A TERMINALLY-ILL PATIENT OR WORKING WITH A RELUCTANT PATIENT WITHOUT APPROPRIATE TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT MAY EXCEED THE CAPABILITIES OF THE INEXPERIENCED CAREGIVER.

ROLE UNDERLOAD AND UNDERUTILIZATION.

THIS CAN OCCUR UNDER WORK CONDITIONS OF MONOTONY AND BOREDOM, THAT IS, WHEN WORKERS HAVE TOO LITTLE TO DO, VERY LITTLE CHALLENGE TO THEIR ABILITIES OR WHEN THEY USE ONLY ONE SKILL, AS IN THE CASE OF ASSEMBLY LINE WORKERS.

ROLE UNDERLOAD AND UNDERUTILIZATION ARE LESS LIKELY TO OCCUR IN THE WORK CONTEXT OF CAREGIVERS. HUMAN BEINGS ARE COMPLEX ORGANISMS AND ANY WORK ROLE WHICH INVOLVES INTERACTION WITH OTHER PEOPLE WILL HAVE VARIETY AND CHANGE ALMOST BUILT IN TO IT. AN EXCEPTION TO THE ABOVE COULD OCCUR, WHEN THE CAREGIVER, PERHAPS AS A RESULT OF EXCESSIVE STRESS, WILL BEGIN TO VIEW HIS OLDER ADULT CLIENTS AS OBJECTS AND TREAT THEM IN A HIGHLY ROUTINIZED AND IMPERSONAL MANNER; OR WHEN THE WORKER HAS A PREFERENCE TO WORK WITH OBJECTS AND THINGS RATHER THAN WITH PEOPLE. IN THAT CASE, EVEN A MODERATE LEVEL OF INTERPERSONAL CONTACTS MAY BE EXPERIENCED AS EXCESSIVE. STRESS RESULTING FROM ROLE UNDERUTILIZATION IS MORE LIKELY TO OCCUR IN YOUR CLIENTS/PATIENTS WHO MAY FEEL UNWANTED, "KICKED OUT", AND USELESS WITH LITTLE TO DO, FOLLOWING YEARS OF ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT WITH THEIR FAMILIES, CAREERS AND THE COMMUNITY.

WORKING WITH THE OLDER ADULT POPULATION PRESENTS A SPECIAL CHALLENGE TO CAREGIVERS. THEY ASSUME PRACTICALLY TOTAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE LIVES OF THEIR INCREASINGLY MORE DEPENDENT CLIENTS. HOWEVER DEDICATED THEIR CAREGIVING IS, THEY CANNOT EXPECT THEIR CLIENTS/PATIENTS TO IMPROVE. THEREFORE, CAREGIVERS NEED TO COME TO TERMS WITH THE REALITY THAT REGARDLESS OF THE EXTENT OF THEIR DEDICATION AND CARE, MANY OF THEIR CLIENTS MAY NOT IMPROVE AND SOME MAY EVEN DIE.

Caregivers should focus on the improved quality of life of their clients and avoid unrealistic expectations which could lead to disappointment.

Role Significance.

The importance of the role in the eyes of the worker and the general public could influence the level of stress experienced on the job. If you value the care you give older adults and see your work as a calling you are more likely to withstand the stressfulness of the job, than someone who views his work as just a job to make a living. In a society which places a high value on old age and honours the wisdom of the aged, caregiving to older adults is much more rewarding to the self-respect, of the worker and thus, less stressful than in our own society where attitudes toward the older adult population are ambivalent at best.

SUMMATION

This module examined some major conditions in the work environment of human service workers which have the potential of becoming stressors----capable of producing stress in you. To become aware of your work stress you need to examine each of these conditions in your particular work setting. What is the degree of threat or harm to you that you see in each of these conditions, at the present time? What are the resources available to you to deal with the potential threat? If you are genuinely interested in being a caregiver to the older adult population----you have already an important resource. Do you have support systems----at work and outside work? What is the quality of these support systems? Caregivers in particular need to develop support systems within the work environment and in their private lives. They are constantly called upon to give of themselves and, therefore, they need to develop and maintain opportunities for themselves to be comforted, encouraged, and to recharge their energies. Do you have regular opportunities to relax, use up physical energy in a preferred way? Are you on a balanced diet? What are your self-defeating ways of combating stress (e.g. smoking, alcohol, drugs, self-blame). Examine these carefully and consider some alternative, more effective ways to deal with your stress that are right for you.

DOES YOUR JOB REQUIRE PARTICULAR SKILLS AND/OR KNOWLEDGE WHICH YOU ARE LACKING? SEEK OUT NEW INFORMATION, TAKE A COURSE TO UPDATE YOUR KNOWLEDGE, PARTICIPATE IN A PERSONAL GROWTH GROUP IN YOUR COMMUNITY. IN DOING ALL OR SOME OF THESE ACTIVITIES YOU AIM AT REDUCING THE STRESSFULNESS OF YOUR WORK BY INCREASING YOUR PERSONAL RESOURCEFULNESS. (REREAD PAGE #8 OF THIS MODULE)

APPENDIX

Selected Readings

Lerner, P. Michael. (1980). "Stress At The Work Place : The Approach of the Institute for Labor and Mental Health," Catalyst, No.8, 1980.

Levy S. Barry and Wegman, H. David. (1983). Occupational Health:Recognizing and Preventing Work-Related Disease. Little, Brown and Company, Boston/Toronto.

Neidhardt, E. Joseph. et.al (1982). Introduction to stress and stress management. Western Center Health Group, a division of the Western Center for Preventive and Behavioral Medicine, Vancouver, B.C.

Schwartz, E. Gary. (1980). "Stress Management in Occupational Settings," Public Health Reports. March-April, Vol. 95, No.2

Additional Resources

Place: National Film Board of Canada
245 Main St.
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 1A7

Stress

Dr. Hans Selye's research and writings on the subject of stress are world-renowned. In this early documentary study, filmed in 1956, he is interviewed in his laboratories at the Universite de Montreal where he explains his discoveries. Stress, the general strain on the body caused by disease, injury or mental pressure, is explained and we are shown some of the experiments that led Dr. Selye to his discovery. A French-language version, Selye et le stress, is also available.

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Additional Transparency Slides were made available by:

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ELDERLY SERVICE WORKERS' TRAINING PROJECT (ESWTP)

TITLES OF THE TRAINING PROJECT'S MODULES

Block A: Basic Knowledge of Aging Process

A.1 Program Planning for Older Adults **
A.2 Stereotypes of Aging **
A.3 Human Development Aspects of Aging **
A.4 Social Aspects of Aging **
A.5 Physiological Aspects of Aging **
A.6 Death and Bereavement **
A.7 Psychological Aspects of Aging **
A.8 Confusion and the Older Adult **
A.9 Nutrition and the Older Adult **
A.10 Listening and the Older Adult **

Block B: Cultural Gerontology

B.1 Ukrainian Culture **
B.1.1 Communication and Adjustment *
B.1.2 Communication and Adjustment *

B.2 German Culture **
B.2.1 Communication and Adjustment *

B.3 French Culture *
B.3.1 Communication and Adjustment *

B.4 Native Culture *
B.4.1 Communication and Adjustment *
B.4.2 Communication and Adjustment *

Block C: Work Environment

C.1 Work Environment I *

Resource Materials:

Handbook of Selected Case Studies
User's Guide
ESWTP Authoring System
ESWTP Final Report

Please Note:

ALL MODULES ARE AVAILABLE IN THE PRINT FORMAT. THE CODE FOR IDENTIFYING OTHER FORMATS IS LISTED BELOW.

Code	Format
*	Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) Courseware
**	Interactive Video (Tape)/Computer-Assisted Television Courseware